

29 December 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR : 

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SUBJECT : Historians Access to Classified Documents in Custody of NARS

REFERENCE : Memo for Record from J. B. Pfeiffer,  
14 Oct 76, sub: Meeting of Executive Agency Historians

1. The attached memorandum from James E. O'Neill, Deputy Archivist of the United States, concerns a proposal by the National Archives for an official interagency agreement to grant blanket access to classified documents held by NARS to agency historians working on official histories. (See my MR of 14 Oct 76.) Mr. O'Neill anticipates presenting the Interagency Agreement on Access for Agency Historians to the ICRC for signature in February 1977.

2. The proposal presents at least two problems for CIA:

a. This Agency has no way of knowing what documents may be included in donor collections held in the various Presidential libraries.

b. The CIA History Staff has been in limbo for two and a half years and has been prohibited from granting access to its own historical document files to other agency historians. It is entirely possible, however, that acceptance of the NARS proposal would give other agency historians access to documents which are duplicates of those in our historical files -- documents which we as an Agency cannot make available to other agency requestors! (Hoist with our own petard!)

3. Even when the History Staff is properly resurrected -- as surely it must be -- the problem of Agency documents contained in donor grants to NARS, particularly grants to Presidential libraries, will remain.

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4. It is my recommendation that the Agency representative to the ICRC be instructed not to sign the proposed interagency agreement and that requests for CIA documents held by NARS continue to be handled on an individuals case basis.

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Dr. Jack B. Pfeiffer  
Acting Chief, History Staff  
203 Key Bldg., 

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GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

*National Archives and Records Service*

*Washington, DC 20408*



DEC 23 1976

Dr. Jack B. Pfeiffer  
Chief, History Staff  
Central Intelligence Agency  
Washington, DC 20505

Dear Dr. Pfeiffer:

Pursuant to the opinions expressed at the meeting of agency historians on October 13, enclosed you will find a draft interagency agreement on access by agency historians to classified materials in the custody of the National Archives and Records Service. Please submit any comments or revisions to me by January 7, 1977. We hope to present a final version for signature to the agencies at the February meeting of the Interagency Classification Review Committee.

Sincerely,

JAMES E. O'NEILL  
Deputy Archivist  
of the United States

Enclosure



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Unlike non-governmental historical researchers or former agency officials who were Presidential appointees, agency historians were not granted special access privileges under Executive Order 11652 and its implementing National Security Council directive. Consequently, agency historians who seek to do research in files held by the National Archives and Records Service containing classified information originated by agencies other than the historians' own, must obtain both access and copy permission from the agency of origin or its successor. For a single research project, this may require contacts with 20 or more agencies, including some that no longer have the authority to classify but whose classified documents from a former authority still exist. Agency historians must write to each pertinent agency, and the agency must notify the National Archives and Records Service that either or both access and copy permission have been granted. Normally, access and copy permissions are granted on a project-by-project basis, and when the historians move on to a new research area the process must begin all over again. The National Archives is obliged to keep voluminous records of the projects, historians, and clearances, and the lack of a streamlined procedure results in frustrating delays for all concerned.

In an effort to alleviate this complicated procedure, a group of agency historians and National Archives staff members met on October 13, 1976. The participants agreed to seek an interagency agreement allowing

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historians of signatory agencies access and copy permission to classified material originated by signatory agencies and now found in the holdings of the National Archives and Records Service. All agencies currently members of the Interagency Classification Review Committee plus those agencies such as Agriculture that once had but no longer have the authority to classify would be asked to sign the agreement, and the National Archives and Records Service would monitor the agreement and guarantee that no material above the level of the researchers' clearances was made available.

Interagency Agreement on  
Access for Agency Historians

In order to facilitate official governmental historial research projects, the undersigned agencies agree to reciprocal rights of access, including the acquisition of copies, in accordance with the provisions of Executive Order 11652, and its implementing National Security Council directive, to materials classified by the agencies and now a part of accessioned Federal records or donated historical materials in the custody of the National Archives and Records Service, provided that:

(a) the access is limited to historians and historical researchers of signatory agencies engaged in official research projects;

(b) access is limited to material at or below the level of the researcher's clearance;

(c) materials and information derived from such access would not be compromised or published without the consent of the agency of origin.